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CHINESE-SRI VIJAYA NEXUS AGAINST THE CHOLAS?

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The indologists, historians and scholars of multi – disciplines have puzzled about the love- hate relationship of the kingdoms of the Sri Vijayas and the "Imperial Cholas". The claims of the Chinese Emperors" that the "Imperial Cholas" were subjects and under control of them and as well as Sri Vijaya rulers. Based on the Chinese sources, the Cholas were depicted as ambassadors sending tributes to please the Chinese Emperors, so that they granted permission to carry out trade in their Kingdoms. The Chola King Rajaraja- I, has been portrayed as meek, mild and naïve ruler submitting to the Emperor with all self-surrendering and making requests with the begging language.[1] The Srivijayan ruler was a vassal of the Chinese emperor, per the Chinese tributary system.[2] As a token of his regard, the Chinese emperor would sometimes confer military titles on the Maharajas or rulers of Sri vijaya. For instance, in the year 904 CE, a title was conferred on a Malay envoy by a ruler of the tang dynasty, possibly a reward for being loyal and dutiful towards China.[3] The Chinese accounts reportedly refer to the Chola Kingdom in peculiar way of combination of Chinese characters that are identified with the "Imperial Cholas", particularly "Rajaraja" and "Kulottunga". They always considered the Cholas as their vassal Kingdom paying tribute to them. The copper plate inscription of Rajaraja, Larger Leiden grant mentioned about Sri Vijaya. Indians are informed now that the Song Annals and other Chinese accounts mention the Cholas as "Zhu-nian". The strategic location of the Sri Vijayan empire, between China and India, was a crucial factor.[4] Both the Cholas and Sri Vijayans were so friendly with each other, but suddenly becoming enemies and thus invading Sri Vijaya, was only suspected by the experts. The existence of such network for the passage of or transmission was amazing and interesting.

As the goods and services of the kingdoms of china, South, East, Asia, India and Arabia were exported and imported through their respective harbours and as well as other ports, each Kingdom had their own ships, boats, loading- unloading facilities, repair and reconditioning workshops, organized Customs department etc. The eastern coast was known as "Chozamandalam", mentioned as "Coromandel Coast" and the Eastern Ocean as "Cholas Ocean" / "Cholas Lake" later changed to "Bay of Bengal", etc., abundantly prove their dominance and control over the waters. During the reign of the Cholas, they were controlling the eastern coast effectively that there were no such incidences recorded. Thus, the ports of the Cholas had been totally protected and controlled for handling the foreign shops, implying the well- established fleet and cargo-ships handling capabilities. The Sanskrit and Tamil inscriptions found in the South East Asia region amply prove that the Indian traders or the Merchant Guilds or Corporations were there very much crossing the oceans, settles with there and doing business with the locals. They could also build Temples and Viharas with metallic alloyed icons and fine stone sculptures. The Chinese could leave the ceramics porcelains and few copper coins. Their partners Sri Vijayans could leave perhaps nothing but seeking permission to build Buddhist Vihara. The Nagapattinam Vihara was called "Rajaraja Perumpalli" and constructed in Indian style, though contributed by the Sri Vijayans. In other words, though Sri Vijayans got permission, the Vihara was built by the Indians only, unlike the Indians going there and building temples.[5] "Zhufan zhi" recorded about Sri Vijayans forcing foreign ships to stop at their ports, as otherwise, they would be attacked by their powerful navy and destroyed. Later, he even pointed out that they were obstructing the Cargo- ships operating between Indian and the Chinese ports passing through the sea-route.[6]

The non-Indian accounts give entirely different picture about the Indian waters and ports. Indian ports had been without piracy and therefore even the Arab Ships wanted to come to anchor at the ports of Malabar and Coromandal coasts, while they were going to and retuning form the South East, Asia and china regions. There was no grudge for the Chinese about the Chola Kingdom. The bay of Bengal and "Indian Ocean" were under their control. In spite of submission of Sri Vijayans to Chinese, the expansion of Chinese shipping overseas in later sung period became a major threat to them. In fact, the Chinese merchants were affecting the business interests of them particularly in the pepper trade. The emperors losing control over the merchants. In desperation, Sri Vijayans used force to compel the ship-cargos to their ports in 1178. However, the Chinese writing did not inform about the reciprocity of the Chinese Emperors to the tribute paying vassal states. Though three Trade Missions of the Cholas reached the Chinese Courts in 1015,1033 and 1077, they continued to record low about the Chola Kings.[7] The Chinese records always recorded the Cholas with utter contempt and hate that too with denigrating and disparaging language. The letter supposedly written by Rajaraja- I to the Chinese Emperor exposes such mentality and psyche of the Chinese.[8] K.A.N.Sastri had pointed out this important fact of decentralization of trade. In south India, the merchants had certainly more freedom and scope for initiative, and a better capacity for voluntary organization than in China; they were less at the mercy of government officials, and exercised a great deal of autonomy in the regulation of their own affairs[9].

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